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ART & DESIGN

## What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

By **Roberta Smith**, John Vincler, Max Lakin, Travis Diehl and Seph Rodney  
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*Want to see new art in New York this weekend? Start in the Upper East Side with Frank Diaz Escalet's rich flat paintings of musicians. Then head to Chelsea to see Ellsworth Kelly's colorful, collaged works at Matthew Marks. And don't miss Elizabeth Englander's strange and strangely affecting sculptures of dismembered nutcrackers in TriBeCa.*

### Newly Reviewed

UPPER EAST SIDE

#### Frank Diaz Escalet

Through July 29. Meredith Ward Fine Art, 44 East 74th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-7306, [meredithwardfineart.com](http://meredithwardfineart.com); through June 18 at Anton Kern Gallery, 16 East 55th Street, Manhattan; 212-367-9663, [antonkerngallery.com](http://antonkerngallery.com).



Frank Diaz Escalet's "Prez 'n' Blue" silhouettes the saxophonist Lester Young and the trumpeter Blue Mitchell. Meredith Ward Fine Art

Two gallery shows celebrate the achievement of the Puerto Rico-born artist, Frank Diaz Escalet (1930-2012), who initially made paintings from stained leather before translating its rich flat colors into acrylic paint. Escalet's life had its share of sadness, but the condensed version centers on a man who, from 1958 to 1971, lived in a loft on the Bowery, frequented New York's jazz scene and enjoyed considerable success providing custom-made leather garments for celebrity clients, who included Aretha Franklin and the Rolling Stones. In 1971, he moved to Maine, where demand for his designs disappeared, and by the mid-1980s, he had turned full time to his leather paintings.

The two shows reflect the breadth of Escalet's subjects and sympathies, from mythic musicians to moments in ordinary, sometimes oppressed, lives. "Sing Me the Blues" at Meredith Ward reflects an ecumenical love of music with works titled "Taxi Dancers, 1940s," "Nite at the Opera," "Tango No. 12" and "Can-Can." "Prez 'n' Blue" silhouettes the saxophonist Lester Young and the trumpeter Blue Mitchell in performance against big geometric planes of bright magenta and yellow.



Escalet's "Untitled" (1976), leather and acrylic on panel, at Anton Kern Gallery. Phoebe D'Heurle and Anton Kern Gallery

The show at Anton Kern, organized with the Andrew Kreps Gallery and Kaufmann Repetto, begins with an especially beautiful untitled composition in leather from 1975: a gramophone with a psychedelic sound horn, a muscular arm operating its hand crank and, floating before it, a pair of eyes and singing lips — all this against a background of pale buttery yellow. Other works feature a chain gang, a washerwoman and an airman about to hand-spin a plane's propeller. These shows are both great. **ROBERTA SMITH**